



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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MARCH 6, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GRAVES ANNOUNCES RECORD NUMBER OF CHILD EXPLOITATION CASES

‘We prosecuted more child exploitation cases than any district
east of the Rocky Mountains.’

– *Todd Graves*

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that a record number of child exploitation cases were filed in federal court in 2005.

"Preventing the exploitation of children, and prosecuting those who use the Internet to prey upon them, is my highest local priority," Graves said at a news conference in Kansas City today. "Thanks to tougher federal laws and aggressive prosecution, child sexual predators can find no refuge from justice in cyberspace."

According to Graves, 42 child exploitation cases were filed in the Western District of Missouri in 2005. Those cases included charges related to child pornography, enticing a minor to engage in illicit sexual activity, distributing obscenity to a minor, or sexual abuse of a child.

"We're in the forefront of efforts nationwide to protect our children," Graves said. "This district was ranked sixth nationally in prosecutions of child exploitation cases among the 93 federal districts in 2005. We prosecuted more child exploitation cases than any district east of the Rocky Mountains. And we're redoubling our efforts this year, with 13 child exploitation cases filed in just the past two months."

During the past year, Graves added, there were 38 convictions in child exploitation cases, either by trial or guilty plea.

"This continues a trend of dramatic increases in the number of child exploitation cases

filed in the Western District of Missouri,” Graves said. “Before I launched the Computer Crimes and Child Exploitation Unit in 2002, we averaged about a dozen cases per year. That tripled in the unit’s first full year, with 36 cases filed in 2004 followed by a 17 percent increase last year.”

These numbers, Graves added, don’t include other computer-related crimes prosecuted by the Computer Crimes and Child Exploitation Unit, such as hacking, ID theft, Internet fraud and counterfeiting.

On Friday, a federal grand jury in Jefferson City returned indictments in five separate and unrelated cases for attempting to entice a minor to engage in illicit sexual activity or distributing obscene material to a minor. In 2005, there was a total of three child exploitation cases filed in Jefferson City.

Defendants in last week’s Jefferson City cases included a youth swim coach, a prison guard, and a commercial airline pilot.

“This is a tragic reminder that child sexual predators come from all walks of life, and all socio-economic backgrounds,” Graves said. “We have prosecuted Boy Scout leaders, church volunteers, social workers, a police officer, a mayor from a small town, several businessmen, prominent attorneys, even a judge. What makes this scary is the fact that the perpetrator can be someone you’d never expect, someone the parents and children know and trust.”

As the Internet has grown more pervasive, with faster downloads, popular chat rooms, new software such as file-sharing and instant messaging, and digital photography, sexual predators have seized upon the new technology. With digital cameras and video recorders, producing child abuse images has now become easy and inexpensive. The Internet allows images and videos to be copied and disseminated to tens of thousands of individuals at the click of a button. The distribution and receipt of such images can be done almost anonymously. As a result, child pornography is readily available through virtually every Internet technology (web sites, email, instant messaging/ICQ, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), newsgroups/bulletin boards, and peer-to-peer). The technological ease, lack of expense, and anonymity in obtaining and distributing child pornography has resulted in an explosion in the availability, accessibility, and volume of child pornography.

“Not only is child pornography easier to collect over the Internet,” Graves said, “this technology has opened virtual doors to help predators contact their victims directly without their parents being aware of it. Unfortunately, the same advances in computer and telecommunication technology that allow our children to reach out to new sources of knowledge and cultural experiences are also leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and harm by computer-sex offenders.”

According to a U.S. Department of Justice study, of the estimated 24 million child Internet-users, one in five has received unwanted sexual solicitations, with teen girls being the primary target.

“We’re aggressively responding to that challenge,” Graves said. Six attorneys work full-time in the Computer Crimes unit, including two who devote their time solely to child exploitation cases. A computer forensic investigator works at the Midwest Regional Computer Forensics Laboratory (one of only 11 computer forensics labs in the nation). The local FBI Cybercrimes Squad, Graves said, “is reputed to be among the busiest in the nation,” and the U.S. Attorney’s Office has forged partnerships with state and local law enforcement agencies, such as the Platte County Sheriff’s Department and Prosecutor’s Office, the Kansas City Police Department and the Boone County Sheriff’s Department and Prosecutor’s Office, and channeled federal grants to assist investigations.

Undercover operations, Graves explained, have become a critical crime prevention tool. “Our goal is to stop child sexual predators before they contact a real victim,” Graves said. “If we prosecute them for child pornography, we may prevent them from acting out their fantasies by victimizing even more children. And if they are soliciting an undercover agent for sex, that means it’s just a matter of time before they victimize a real boy or girl.”

Graves, who is a former co-chair of the Department of Justice Child Exploitation and Obscenity Working Group, lauded the FBI’s Cybercrimes Task Force and the Metro Area Child Exploitation Task Force (MACE) as examples of a shared commitment in the law enforcement community. These organizations provide an opportunity for law enforcement officers to network and share intelligence as well as investigative expertise.

“These coordinated, concerted efforts represent a united front against child exploitation and cyber crimes,” Graves said. “To successfully combat Internet crimes against children, a region must have interagency involvement and cooperation.”

“I’ve often said that, as bad as you can imagine child porn is on the Internet, it’s even worse,” Graves said. “It’s not just images of child porn, as bad as that is. Most defendants have hundreds or thousands of those images stored on their computers. But they often have collections of videos of child rapes and nudity and other illicit conduct. The growing threat of sexual exploitation crimes committed against children through the Internet is a disturbing and unacceptable trend.”

Once those images are available on the Internet, they are distributed around the world and circulate for years to come. “We routinely prosecute defendants who have collected images of child pornography that we know was produced using child victims in the Kansas City area and elsewhere years ago,” Graves said. “Even when these children become adults, they are victimized again and again, every time another pervert downloads one of those images or distributes it to another collector.”

Graves’ efforts to combat child exploitation were strengthened in 2003, when Congress passed the PROTECT Act to enforce tougher penalties and provide more tools to protect children. For example, the PROTECT Act established a national AMBER Alert program and authorized wiretaps to investigate serious sexual crimes against children. It eliminated the statute of limitations for crimes involving the abduction or physical or sexual abuse of a child.

“Tougher penalties under the PROTECT Act reflect the seriousness of these crimes,” Graves said. For example, there is a 15-year mandatory minimum prison sentence for producing child pornography and a five-year mandatory minimum prison sentence for distributing child pornography, or for using the Internet to entice a minor to engage in illicit sexual activity. A Two Strikes provision requires life imprisonment for offenders who commit two serious sexual abuse offenses against a child. The PROTECT Act restricts the authority of federal judges to give reduced prison sentences. And it increased the post-release supervision of sex offenders from a maximum of five years under supervised release to a potential lifetime under supervised release.

“Much has been accomplished, but more must be done,” Graves said. “Parents used to keep their children safe by avoiding strangers and staying out of bad neighborhoods. But with the advent of the Internet, predators trolling through cyberspace have an open door right into your home. All of us have a duty to be vigilant, for the sake of our own children and for the sake of our community.”

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow/index.html